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Guidance

Safeguarding and DBS Factsheet: FAQs

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This FAQ document accompanies our Safeguarding Factsheet. It is designed to address specific concerns that people involved in supporting their community may have at this time, and is split into two sections:

1. Advice for those organising a community volunteer group, and
2. Advice for individuals wanting to assist those in their local community

We know that many people will want to volunteer to support their local communities, either individually or as part of an organised group. There are many ways to help, but it is important it is done safely for all involved. The 'how to help safely' guidance explains this.

It is vital to remember that you must stay home to protect the NHS and save lives, except for very limited purposes. While you can still provide care or help to a vulnerable person, you must avoid all non-essential contact.

Full guidance from Public Health England is available, here (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>).

Organising a community volunteer group

I'm organising a group of volunteers. I understand that there isn't a legal requirement for me to have my volunteers DBS checked, but should I do so anyway?

Many of the roles that volunteers will carry out in their local communities do not raise safeguarding issues and do not need a DBS check. You can have a look at the DBS eligibility guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-eligibility-guidance>) to confirm whether the activities your group propose to do are captured.

If your group's activities are captured, under normal circumstances we would advise that having volunteers DBS checked is a prudent safeguarding step. There is, however, no legal requirement for you to have a DBS check. Regardless of whether you choose to have volunteers DBS checked, you should ensure your group follow simple, practical precautions such as working safely in pairs, keeping records of money spent and providing shopping receipts to safeguard all involved.

If they are not from the same household, volunteers must stay two metres apart at all times.

Please remember that gatherings of more than two people in public are currently banned, with these measures being enforced by the police.

I want to carry out DBS checks on volunteers who are carrying out activities that are eligible, such as looking after children or providing help with washing and dressing vulnerable people. Who should pay for the checks?

Day-to-day contact with other people should be reduced to reduce the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Personal care of this sort should be provided by professionals, or specialist volunteers with the appropriate skills, training and checks.

Standard or enhanced applications that meet the DBS definition of a volunteer are free-of-charge. To qualify as a volunteer:

- you must not receive any payment or allowances for carrying out an activity, other than travel or out-of-pocket expenses and
- the activity must benefit a third party other than, or as well as a family member.

For more details about applying, please see the DBS guidance on eligibility for standard or enhanced checks (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-eligibility-guidance>) and how to obtain a DBS check (<https://www.gov.uk/dbs-check-applicant-criminal-record/get-a-standard-or-enhanced-dbs-check-for-an-employee>).

Could councils or other local organisations which regularly use DBS services work with my community group to make checks?

Yes, there may be opportunity for organisations that regularly use DBS services to submit checks on behalf of new community groups.

However, in order to submit a DBS check it is essential that someone is making decisions about whether people are suitable to carry out certain activities. It is important to note that on its own, the DBS check does not mean someone is suitable for volunteering work. It is important that good safeguarding practice and awareness continues, even during these circumstances.

Are organisations and their staff/volunteers able to change the activities they are doing to meet community needs without asking for new DBS checks?

DBS checks are applicable to the group of people a volunteer or employee is going to be working with, such as children or vulnerable adults.

For example, if someone usually drives adults to and from hospital, but they are now also helping with shopping, a new DBS check would not be needed. If the same person now wishes to supervise children, then the organisation should assess this change in role and consider whether a new DBS check is appropriate.

If someone who has been working in a nursery wishes to help in a school, for example, then a practical decision can be made about accepting their current certificate for the new role.

You should only leave the house to help a vulnerable person when absolutely necessary.

Are DBS checks transferrable between the organisation that obtained it and the new voluntary group or charity?

If someone has a check from their current or previous role with children or adults, then new voluntary groups can make a practical decision about accepting this for their new role. Although ordinarily a check for a role with children would not be sufficient for working with adults, groups may consider this is a reasonably safe thing to do, based on the information on the check and the surrounding circumstances.

Some individuals may have linked their DBS check to the Update Service, which shows whether their certificate is still valid or if there is new information that could be disclosed.

Please remember that gatherings of more than two people in public are currently banned, with these measures being enforced by the police.

How long do DBS checks last for?

DBS checks do not have an expiry date.

In the case of new voluntary or community groups, we suggest that if a check is older than three years a decision should be made based on the individual and the role they will be carrying out.

Please remember that gatherings of more than two people in public are currently banned, with these measures being enforced by the police.

Would a volunteer in my group be eligible for a DBS check if they visit a house where a child or vulnerable adult, e.g. someone with dementia, lives?

It is important to remember that Public Health England guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>) is to practice social distancing and limit contact with others.

Simply entering someone's home would not make someone eligible to be asked for a DBS check. However, some activities, such as helping someone with their personal care needs (like washing or bathing, or helping someone with eating their meals), may mean a DBS check should be done. The DBS eligibility tool (<https://www.gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check>) will help you work out if what you are doing is eligible for a check.

Everyone must stay at home, except for very limited purpose. If you are providing care or to help a vulnerable person, you should still be following social distancing rules where possible.

Individuals wanting to assist those in their local community

What if I have a criminal record? Will that stop me from volunteering?

If you have a criminal record you can still volunteer for most roles. If you are asked by the volunteer organiser for a DBS check for your volunteering role, you can discuss anything that is disclosed on the certificate with them.

The only people who are legally prevented from volunteering with children and vulnerable adults are those who have been barred from doing so. If you have been barred by the DBS, you will have been informed by DBS, so you will know you have been barred and from what type of work. If you have been barred by DBS from certain types of work, then you would be committing an offence by trying to do that work.

Do I need a DBS check if I'm helping with personal care, such as washing and dressing?

If you are helping in this way for a friend or family member, then you don't apply for a DBS check. However, it is not expected that community volunteers will be offering personal care to strangers. These activities should be provided by professionals.

If someone requires that type of personal care and they don't have the necessary services in place, you should help them to contact the appropriate health and social care services.

My DBS check has recently expired. Do I need to apply for a new one?

As DBS checks do not have an expiry date, you should speak with the organisation that you are going to be working or volunteering for. They may choose to accept the check that you already have.

Do I need a DBS check if I'm helping with medical care?

If someone you are supporting requires medical care, and they don't have the necessary services already in place, you should help them to contact the appropriate health or social care services.

Medical care should be provided by professionals, or specialist volunteers with the appropriate skills, training and checks.